

BOOK REVIEW

AMY STEWART. 2007. **Flower Confidential: the Good, the Bad, and the Beautiful in the Business of Flowers**. (ISBN 13: 978-1-56512-438-7; ISBN 10: 1-56512-438-3, hbk.). Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, P.O. Box 2225, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27515-2225, U.S.A. (**Orders:** www.indiebound.org, www.powells.com, www.amazon.com, www.barnesandnoble.com). \$13.95, 306 pp., black/white photographs and illustrations, 8" × 5 1/2".

Flower Confidential is an un-jaundiced reportage of the floriculture industry worldwide. How does a simple flower—the ancient symbol of perfection, purity, and love—drive a forty million dollar cut-flower business worldwide? What has been gained (and lost) in tinkering with Mother Nature? Should we care if (and why) some roses have lost their scent? Should we be concerned that most flowers are sprayed with pesticides? In a global marketplace, is there such a thing as a socially responsible flower?

Stewart has a meticulously researched writing style that informs but also humorously captivates while covering the subjects of botany, history, and commerce. She travels the globe seeing firsthand how flowers are grown and harvested on farms in Latin America, California, and Holland (which isn't always pretty). She learns about the eccentric American breeder Leslie Woodruff who developed the popular 'Star-Gazer' lily; a breeder of gerberas of every color imaginable; and an Ecuadorian farmer growing exquisite, high-end organic roses that are the floral equivalent of a Tiffany diamond.

"Breeding the perfect flower is a balancing act, a compromise between longevity and scent, color and shape, between what the geneticist can imagine and what the flower will allow."

Go with Stewart to Amsterdam to the famous Aalsmeer flower auction known around the world as a remarkably high-tech, high-speed way to sell flowers. This is the very center of the flower trade where a full 20 percent of the cut flowers in the world are sold and about half of the world's cut-flower supplies move through the Dutch auction system. Follow her to Miami airport where millions of flowers enter the United States and are processed.

Learn how the Dutch are spearheading certification programs to make all flowers safe for the consumer and the laborers who help grow them; how Latin America and the United States are also beginning such 'green' programs; how the public can be ecologically aware consumers and where to find organically grown cut flowers.

There are appendices on: The Care and Feeding of Cut Flowers, Visiting Markets and Growers (a list of markets, festivals, and tourist attractions to reference for a behind-the-scenes look at the cut flower industry), and Statistics (Table 1: Worldwide per capita cut flower consumption; Table 2: Top ten cut flowers, United States, per 1,000 stems; Table 3: U.S. cut flower imports by country of origin; Table 4: U.S. cut flower purchases: Market share of outlet).

Complimenting the author's talent of combining the 'literary' contrast of the romance of flowers with the hard bottom line of commerce, illustrator Emma Skurnick's black and white, pen and ink, diagrammatical botanical illustrations are worth mentioning. These are very informative as well as having an elegance of line that reflects the nature of the flower.—Linny Heagy, *Linny/Designer, Illustrator*, email: a0005835@airmail.net.